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The Rod of Moses, Medieval Judaism: Commentaries, Philosophy, Mysticism, Medieval Midrash

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problem by suggesting that Moses does not even touch the rod at the Red Sea. God orders him to cast it away precisely so that the Egyptians will not say that Moses can only accomplish miracles with his rod (*ShemR* 21:9). However, in a visual depiction of Moses on the walls of the Dura Europos synagogue (ca. 250 CE, in modern-day Syria), Moses swings a club, his staff, over his head, seemingly to smite the waters and part them with the rod (Goodenough: 120–21). The rod brought not only punishment to the Egyptians, but also miracles to Israel (*MekkhY* Be-shallah Wa-Yassa 6).

Bibliography: ■ Goodenough, E. R., *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 10 (New York 1964). ■ Lévi, I., "L'apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès," *REJ* 68 (1914) 129–60. ■ Meillicke, C., "Moses' Staff and the Return of the Dead," *JSQ* 6 (1999) 345–72. ■ Newman, J. H., "The Staff of Moses and the Mercy of God: Moses' Final Intercession in Pseudo-Philo 19," in *Israel in the Wilderness: Interpretation of Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (ed. K. E. Pomykala; Leiden/Boston, Mass. 2008) 137–56. ■ Reeves, J. C., "Excursus on the Eschatological Reappearance of the Staff of Moses," in id., *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postbiblical Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta, Ga. 2005) 187–99. [Available at www.academia.edu]

Joshua Schwartz

C. Medieval Judaism

1. In Exegesis and Philosophy. Rashbam (Samuel ben Meir; ca. 1080–ca. 1160) commenting on Exod 17:1 assumed that Moses' rod served as a reassuring flag to soldiers in battle. Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) on the base of Exod 14:16 negated the power of the rod, contending that the rod did not split the sea, but rather that this was done by the wind sent by God. David Qimhi (ca. 1160–1235) on Isa 63:12 stated that God guided Moses' hand holding the rod. Jewish philosophers, e.g., Maimonides (1138–1204), *Guide* 2:29, rejected the attribution of miracles to the rod: "For although the rod was turned into a serpent ... these and similar things were not permanent and did not turn into another nature." However, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos (1286–1328), asserted that miracles occurred: "If you examine miracles, whose veracity is indicated in the Law of Moses ... you find them of this kind, as in the transformation of a rod into a serpent ..." (Kalonymos: 5). Similarly, Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides; 1288–1344) considered the possibility of miracles pertaining to the rod: "The creation of a sound of speech without the organ of speech is similar to the creation of a serpent from a rod ... a miracle." (Comm. on Exod 19:19)

2. Mysticism. According to the *Zohar* (The Book of Splendor), which was composed in Spain in the late 13th century, the rod originated in the Garden of Eden and was inscribed with miracles as well as with the Ineffable Name (*Zohar* 2:115a). The changing nature of the rod was related to the divine attributes:

The rod of God and the rod of Moses are equivalent, since the purpose of the rod was to stir up the powers of Gevurah (attribute of justice) ... R. Simeon said: Water originates from the side of Gevurah ... Moses was requested to lift up his rod to dry the waters, and to stretch forth his hand to bring the [waters] back on the Egyptians through the agency of Gevurah. (*Zohar* 2:48b; Exod 14:15, 21, 26–27)

Additionally, the rod represented the angel Metatron:

The rod of God was in the hand of Moses [Exod 17:19] – the rod is Metatron, from one side of whom comes life and from the other death. When the rod remains a rod, it is an aid from the side of good, and when it is turned into a serpent it is hostile. (*Zohar* 1:27a)

3. Medieval Midrash. Moses was rewarded with the scepter used by God in the creation of the world. Moreover, Moses' rod was shaped and engraved like God's scepter (*Tan*, Wa-'era 8; *Midrash Petirat Mosheh* in *BHM* 1:21). Moses' rod was created on the sixth day of creation; it was later passed down to the patriarchs; Moses' rod is Aaron's rod; Moses took it himself (*Midrash Wa-yosha'*, *BHM* 1:43; *Chronicles of Moses*, *BatM* 2:7). *Midrash Wayosha'* (and *PRE* 40:2–3) and established a long chain of transmission, from Adam to Jacob, who took it to Egypt and gave it to Joseph. When Joseph died, the Egyptians placed the rod into Pharaoh's palace. Jethro was one of Pharaoh's magicians and he took it. He saw engraved on the rod the Ineffable Name and the Ten Plagues that God would bring upon the Egyptians. Eventually Moses took it from Jethro's garden (Poorthuis). Alternatively, the rod was found on Mount Horeb (*YalqShim* 20); the messiah will use it to subdue the nations (*YalqShim* 896). Moses performed miracles with the rod (*Tan*, *Shemot* 23); the rod was a magic wand (Meillicke) to raise Joseph from the Nile (Ulmer: 124–41). The Ineffable Name and the Ten Plagues were engraved on the rod (*Midrash Wa-yosha'* in *BHM* 1:43; *Tan*, Wa-'era 9; *LeqT* 7:17).

Bibliography: ■ Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, *Sendschreiben an Joseph Kaspi* (ed. J. Perles; Munich 1879). [Heb.] ■ Meillicke, C., "Moses' Staff and the Return of the Dead," *JSQ* 6 (1999) 345–72. ■ Poorthuis, M., "Moses' Rod in Zipporah's Garden," *Sanctity of Time and Space in Modernity* (ed. A. Houtman et al.; Leiden 1998). ■ Ulmer, R., *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash* (Berlin/New York 2009).

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III. Literature

The rod or staff of Moses features in several biblical texts, such as in Exod 4:2–4 where it closely parallels the rod of Aaron in Exod 7:9–12 (see "Aaron's Rod IV. Literature and Music"). It also figures centrally in the plague narratives, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the battle with Amalek (Exod 8–10, 14, and 17). The later episode of the waters of Meribah, in which Moses strikes the rock twice with his rod (Num 20:8–11), also involves Aaron and has a literary afterlife. All these texts credit the God of